

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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USEEC
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ETRD
SUBJECT: APPOINTMENT OF MINISTER FOR SPECIAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE EEC

1. PRIME MINISTER FRASER ANNOUNCED JULY 17 THE CREATION OF A NEW DEPARTMENT OF THE SPECIAL TRADE NEGOTIATOR, AND OF THE APPOINTMENT OF JOHN HOWARD, PREVIOUSLY MINISTER FOR BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS, TO BE MINISTER FOR SPECIAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EEC. NO CHANGE WAS ANNOUNCED IN THE DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS TRADE, ALTHOUGH DOUGLAS MACKAY, PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT, WAS ADDITIONALLY DESIGNATED AS ACTING SECRETARY OF THE NEW DEPARTMENT.

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2. THIS MOVE HAS PUZZLED MOST OBSERVERS AND IS STILL THE SUBJECT OF WIDESPREAD SPECULATION CONCERNING THE REASONS FOR IT, THE PRECISE ROLE OF THE NEW MINISTER AND DEPARTMENT AND HOW IT MAY AFFECT THE FUNCTIONS OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, IN PARTICULAR THE DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS TRADE AND TOA REPRESENTATION AT THE COMMISSION IN BRUSSELS.

3. WHILE SOME OF THESE THINGS WILL ONLY BE CLARIFIED WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME, THE EMBSSY'S BEST CURRENT JUDGEMENT IS AS FOLLOWS: THE MOVE WAS A RELATIVELY SUDDEN DECISION, PROBABLY INSPIRED PRINCIPALLY BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S RECENT ENCOUNTER WITH THE EEC ON TRADE POLICY IN THE COURSE OF HIS EUROPEAN VISIT. THE NEW QTE DEPARTMENT UNQUOTE SEEMS UNLIKELY TO DEVELOP AS A LARGE PERMANENT BUREAUCRACY AND IS MORE LIKELY TO BE A RELATIVELY SMALL SUPPORTING STAFF FOR THE NEW MINISTER, CONSISTING OF KEY INDIVIDUALS DETAILED FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS AND POSSIBLY OTHER INTERESTED DEPARTMENTS, AND/OR OF INDIVIDUALS IN DEPARTMENTS SERVING IN A DUAL CAPACITY AS MEMBERS OF THE NEW DEPARTMENT. IN THE SHORT TIME SINCE THE ORIGINAL ANNOUNCEMENT, OFFICIAL REFERENCES TO THE NEW MINISTER AND HIS NEW DEPARTMENT HAVE IN NUMEROUS CASES OMITTED REFERENCE TO THE EEC, LEADING TO SPECULATION THAT THE NEW SPECIAL TRADE NEGOTIATING MACHINERY MAY ALSO BE USED, WHEN CONVENIENT, IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH TRADE PARTNERS OTHER THAN THE EEC. SOME OF MINISTER HOWARD'S EARLY STATEMENTS HAVE ENCOURAGED THIS VIEW.

4. WHILE THERE IS SOME LEGAL NECESSITY UNDER AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, FOR ANY OFFICIAL DESIGNATED AS A MINISTER TO HAVE A DEPARTMENT, IT SEEMS POSSIBLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT OVER TIME THE ROLE OF THE NEW MINISTER JAY RESEMBLE THAT OF AN ADDITIONAL MINISTER WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF OVERSEAS TRADE WITH A SPECIAL DEGREE OF AUTONOMY IN HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER INTERESTED DEPARTMENTS AND A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRADE NEGOTIATIONS. ONE CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH POINTS IN THIS DIRECTION IS THE FACT THAT THE MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS TRADE, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY, IS ALSO HEAVILY BURDENED WITH HIS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE KEY DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL RESOURCES, AND IS IN ADDITION STILL CONVALESING FROM AN EXTENDED SERIOUS ILLNESS WHICH MIGHT MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO CARRY A HEAVY NEGOTIATING BURDEN IN THE TRADE FIELD.

5. MINISTER HOWARD, A HIGHLY REAGARDED LIBERAL PARTY MP FROM NEW SOUTH WALES, HAS SERVED AS MINISTER FOR BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS IN THE FRASER CABINET SINCE DECEMBER 1975. HE IS CREDITED WITH HAVING DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB IN THAT ASSIGNMENT, AND IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE STRONGER MEMBERS OF THE FRASER CABINET. HIS FORMER DEPARTMENT HAS RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THE CABINET FOR IMPORT PROTECTION POLICY, AND THE MINISTER

IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED IN THAT ROLE TO HAVE SUPPORTED
A MODERATE BUT NOT EXTREME PROTECTIONIST POSITION IN
DEALING WITH THE LARGE NUMBER OF SHORT-RUN IMPORT
PROTECTION CASES ARISING IN THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS.

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